



It's June 30, 2020. In today's issue: History Nebraska Foundation; 1968 retrospective; carnival comes to town; Swing Landscape; popular on our blog and social media; upcoming events.

Announcing the History Nebraska Foundation



History Nebraska's audacious goal is to be the most engaging and relevant state historical society in the entire nation.

Today, our Board of Trustees took an important step toward that goal by announcing the launch of the [History Nebraska Foundation](#). This new foundation will be 100 percent dedicated to supporting History Nebraska's mission. The Board of Trustees has expressed their deep gratitude to the Nebraska State Historical Society Foundation (NSHSF) for their past and ongoing support, and looks forward to working with them on future projects.

The events of 2020 have made it clear that history plays an essential role in our lives. Our past shapes who we are, and only by knowing history can we imagine the future. History Nebraska serves as the primary keeper of the state's history and historical resources, and it is our responsibility to share that history with all of our citizens.

Since rebranding in 2018, many of our supporters no longer know us as the Nebraska State Historical Society, but as History Nebraska. We have grown attendance, exponentially expanded online offerings, and have been recognized for award-winning exhibitions and publications.

Looking ahead, we dream of making the state's history accessible to a wider and growing audience. We intend to make an additional one million digital files accessible to the public over the next two years. We will launch a groundbreaking hands-on history lab at our Nebraska History Museum, and begin work on statewide history learning initiatives.

We aspire to be a leader in history education. Our goals include providing greater digital access for our millions of historical resources, transforming field trips into immersive historical experiences, and improving history and civic education for all Nebraskans.

The new History Nebraska Foundation will help us achieve these goals. If you would like to financially support this effort, please donate at historynebraskafoundation.org.



Lance Bristol
President, Board of Trustees
History Nebraska



Trevor Jones
Director & CEO
History Nebraska

Retrospective on 1968



“Get out of here. I can’t teach today.”

It was the morning after Dr. Martin Luther King’s assassination in April of 1968 and our political science professor, a retired military officer, departed as rapidly and grimly as he had come. It was an awful day.

TV was full of protesters demonstrating everywhere, sometimes setting fires and breaking windows. What was happening to our country?

I’ve been asking that same question frequently recently as I flash back to 1968, my senior year at UNL. Forget any romantic nonsense about the ’60’s. Here’s what that year was like for me and my friends. [Keep reading.](#)

When the carnival came to town



Years ago, the peak of Nebraska summer entertainment came with the Walter Savidge Amusement Company as it pulled into the depot aboard its twenty-car, red-and-yellow Pullman train. The Wayne-based traveling show and carnival toured Nebraska and surrounding states from 1906 to 1941.

Walter Savidge was born in Holt County in 1886. He began dreaming of show business at age twelve after attending a Ringling Brothers circus in Humphrey. He practiced tightrope walking on a rope tied between his family's barn and shed. At age sixteen he ran away to "join the circus" and worked as a professional tightrope walker. [Keep reading.](#)

Swing Landscape



Paintings conservator Kenneth Bé recently treated this painting (detail shown above) at History Nebraska's Gerald R. Ford Center in Omaha. It's a study for a 1936 mural entitled *Swing Landscape* by artist Stuart Davis, who studied on Nebraska-raised artist Robert Henri. Stuart was influenced by jazz, radio, film, and consumer products. [Keep reading.](#)

Popular on our blog and social media



- Ward Bond, right, appeared in more than 200 films, including 23 with John Wayne. A [historical marker](#) stands at his childhood home in Benkleman.
- We're [collecting items](#) related to the recent Black Lives Matter protests. Museum registrar Jordan Miller recently [talked about it on 1011Now](#).
- And our [COVID-19 collecting project](#) continues as well.
- Last year's post about [J. Sterling Morton's racial views](#) is getting attention again.
- Is it a little girl or a realistic doll [perched on a ledge at the hospital](#)?
- Thanks to one of our Twitter followers, last month's Peter Sarpy blog post is updated with the story of how [Sarpy illegally enslaved a free Black man](#) in Missouri, and lost in court when the man's mother pressed charges.
- Harlem Renaissance in Nebraska? John Johnson's photography reflected the ideals of a nationwide movement. Here's [one of our favorite Johnson photos](#).



Upcoming events

Mad Science at the Museum events are scheduled for July and August. Read more about them [here](#).

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Retrospective on 1968



By Eileen Wirth

“Get out of here. I can’t teach today.”

It was the morning after Dr. Martin Luther King’s assassination in April of 1968 and our political science professor, a retired military officer, departed as rapidly and grimly as he had come. It was an awful day.

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Just as the pandemic hovers over everything now, the Vietnam War was our omnipresent black cloud. By early 1968, there were more than 400,000 Americans fighting there with the number likely to increase. Racial issues also fueled the unrest and disturbances.

OMG! They were coming after the guys I knew, the privileged Boomers who had gone to college on draft deferments knowing the war would be over by graduation. It wasn’t. It had gotten far worse.

As college kids suddenly realized they could get drafted and killed like blue collar blacks and whites, many took to the streets as they had seen civil rights demonstrators do. And the cops pushed back. Lincoln was placid but Omaha suffered disturbances.

The political landscape was grim. We expected President Johnson to run against Richard Nixon: the war escalator vs. the candidate of law and order. In addition, George Wallace of Alabama traveled the country stirring up racial hostility to win votes.

Due to the rioting following Wallace's spring rally in Omaha, the State Basketball Tournament moved to Lincoln with National Guardsmen on duty at the Coliseum for all games, even those between rural schools. Could this be happening on OUR campus?

After anti-war Sen. Eugene McCarthy almost defeated Johnson in the New Hampshire primary, my hero, Sen. Robert Kennedy, entered the race while Johnson abruptly announced he wouldn't run.

Suddenly Nebraska counted in the presidential race since we were one of only 14 states that had a presidential primary. I skipped a geology lab to hear Bobby speak to a packed Coliseum, unfortunately about agriculture not the war, but we had seen Bobby!

He campaigned hard in Omaha, making one important speech chastising Creighton University students for opposing the draft and letting poor blacks and whites fight the war. A photo of him making that speech now hangs in my basement. I brought it home from my office at Creighton when I retired after teaching journalism there for 25 years. Kennedy won our primary then moved on to Oregon and California.

The morning after the California primary, June 5, I eagerly turned on my radio to find out if he had won since TV stations went off the air at midnight. Driving to a summer class, I heard the terrible news.

"Sen. Kennedy is in extremely critical condition," said the announcer. Bobby had been shot in the head and was clinging to life but could not recover. Not again!

My job at the *Lincoln Journal* that day was to watch the wire service machines to rush the news of his death to the news editor. I can still see those machines just as the images of his funeral train remain vivid. I prayed that our hope for healing our country did not die with Bobby but it felt like it.



Daily Nebraskan, June 11, 1968, p. 4.

In July, I graduated and clung to the last few weeks with my friends, many facing an uncertain future with the draft. We watched the Democratic Convention in Chicago at night, dismayed by the violence between student protesters and police.

Poor Vice President Hubert Humphrey, the decent-but-traditional Democratic candidate. He never recovered from those awful images as Nixon constantly promised to restore law and order. Under Nixon, the country experienced four more years of a bigger war and expanded protests.

Back then, they called Nixon's supporters the "silent majority" instead of the president's "base" but the battle lines and images are hauntingly similar to today with one significant difference.

Supposedly the current law and order campaign is aimed at older voters just like in 1968. But many of the people like me who are having flashbacks to 50 years ago haven't changed our politics as our hair color has changed. We remember the horrors of 1968 only too well.

But even so, I'd like to offer a word of hope for the current generation. We survived graduating in 1968 and I'm optimistic that somehow you'll get through this too. Believe me, we're all for you during this terrible time.

Dr. Eileen Wirth is a History Nebraska trustee and an emerita professor of journalism at Creighton University. She is a University of Nebraska-Lincoln alumna, Class of 1968.



Do you remember 1968? Or do your parents or grandparents have stories? Here are some other Nebraska perspectives on that crucial year:

The 1968 Nebraska Republican Primary (PDF), from Nebraska History, Fall 2014.

Robert Kennedy and the 1968 Nebraska campaign trail (blog post)

Video of Robert F. Kennedy in Nebraska (YouTube)

“And Then the Burnings Began”: Omaha’s Urban Revolts and the Meaning of Political Violence (PDF), from Nebraska History, Summer 2017.

1968 Presidential Campaigns in Nebraska, 2008 Nebraska History Museum lecture by Bill Kelly of NET Television (YouTube)

’68: The Year Nebraska Mattered (NET Television)

(Posted 6/30/2020)

Categories:

[1960s; University of Nebraska-Lincoln; politics](#)

When the Carnival Came to Town

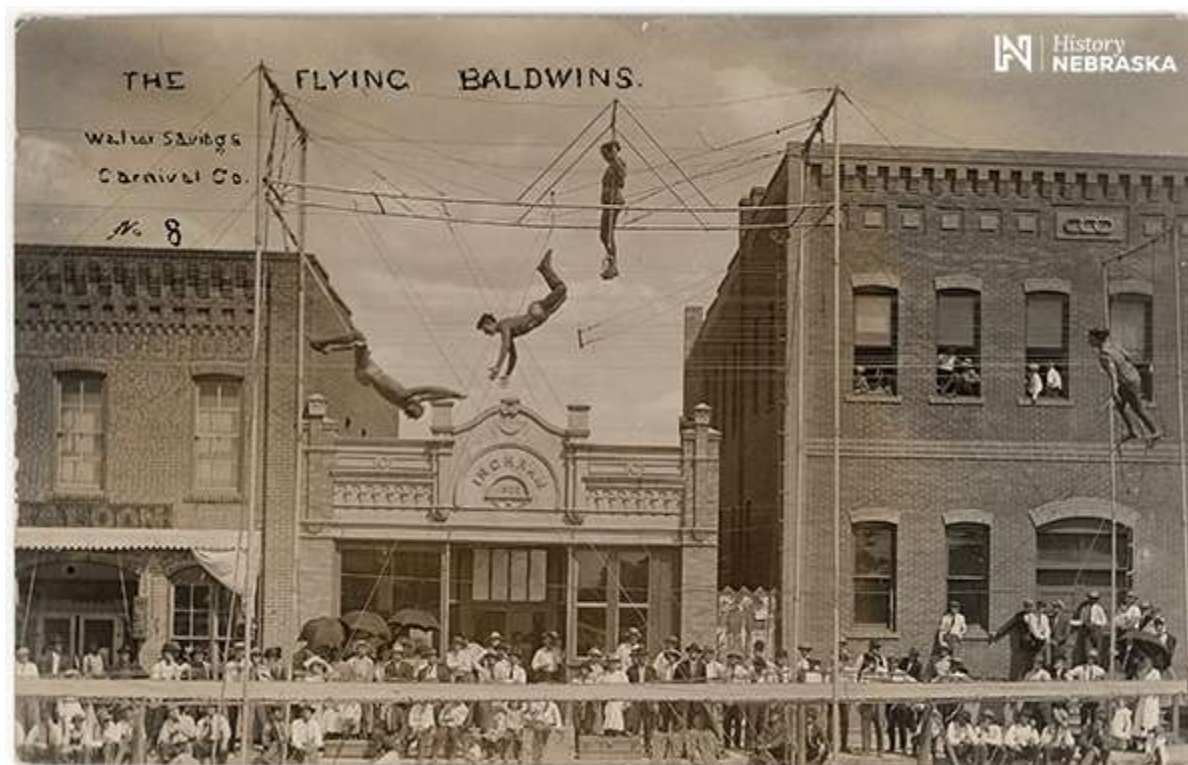


Photo: The Flying Baldwins were a popular feature of the Walter Savidge Amusement Company. History Nebraska RG1667-1-15

Years ago, the peak of Nebraska summer entertainment came with the Walter Savidge Amusement Company as it pulled into the depot aboard its twenty-car, red-and-yellow Pullman train. The Wayne-based traveling show and carnival toured Nebraska and surrounding states from 1906 to 1941.

Walter Savidge was born in Holt County in 1886. He began dreaming of show business at age twelve after attending a Ringling Brothers circus in Humphrey. He practiced tightrope walking on a rope tied between his family's barn and shed. At age sixteen he ran away to "join the circus" and worked as a professional tightrope walker.

The Savidges were an adventurous clan. You may have heard of Walter's aviator cousins from Ewing. The Savidge Brothers built their first airplane in 1911 and barnstormed the state for several years.

Walter was no aviator, but he and his brother Arthur formed an amusement company in 1906, when Walter was only twenty years old. It started as a one-tent show, with Walter doubling as an acrobat and Arthur performing as one of the actors. The brothers split several years later, and Walter and his wife, Mabel, continued the company. It remained a family affair, with Mabel managing the finances and playing piano for the vaudeville acts.

The company got bigger and bigger, with acrobats, sideshows, an orchestra and dramatic company, carnival rides and concession stands. It was so big they brought their electrical plant to power it all. The big tent could seat 1,600 people, and it took 125 employees to keep everything running.



Photo: View from the stage of Savidge Players tent theater. History Nebraska RG1667-1-13

The Savidges were known for providing clean, family-friendly entertainment. Despite the bad reputation of “carnies,” the Savidge crew “is not made of crude fellows who ‘flop’ in strange places, no indeed,” said the *Omaha World-Herald*. “Savidge and his company are welcomed with open arms each year in towns that he has played before.”

Interest in show dwindled in the late 1930s, probably due to newer forms of entertainment, such as movies. The Savidges closed their show and retired in 1941. Walter died eight years later. Mabel lived until 1989, dying at age 104.

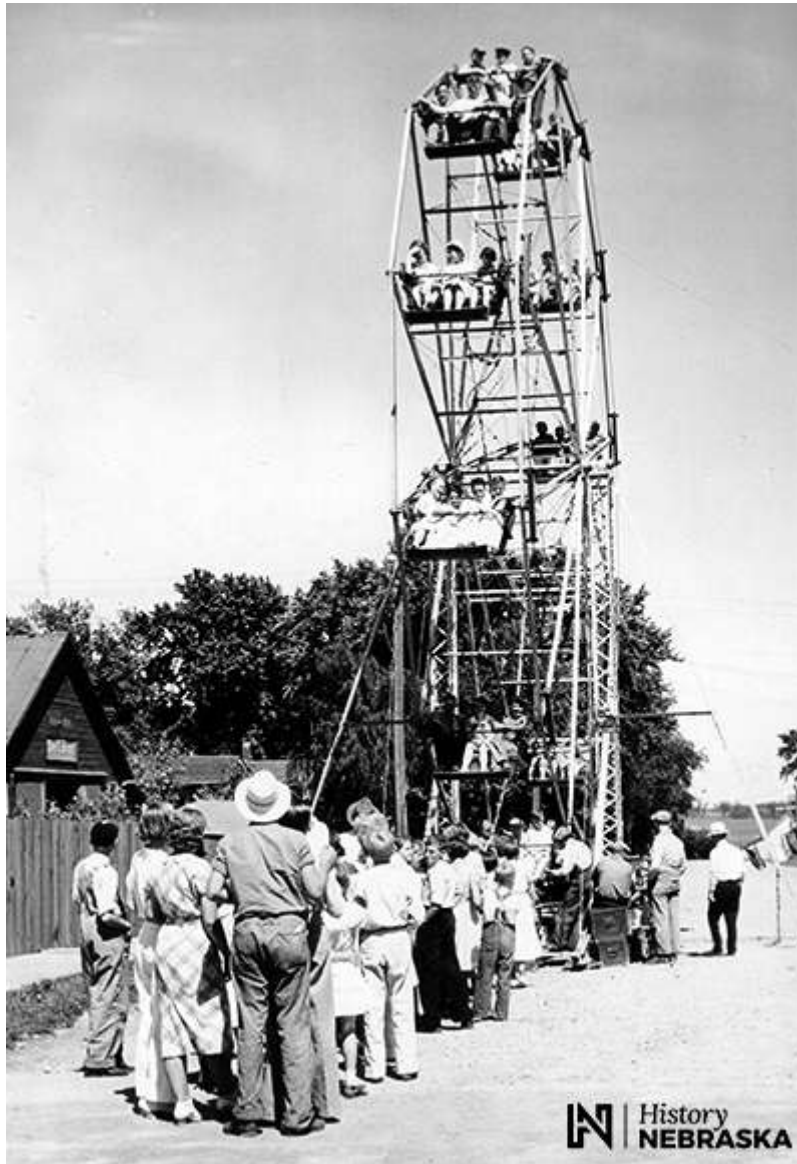


Photo: The "Eli Wheel," a competitor of the Ferris Wheel. History Nebraska RG1667-3-1



Photo: Savidge invested in new and expensive carnival rides. History Nebraska RG1667-3-3

<h1>Long Pine Summer Carnival</h1> <p>June 13, 14, 15, 16, and 17</p>					
<p>Visit The African Ostrich Farm</p> <hr/> <p>Take a Ride on the Merry-Go- Round</p> <hr/> <p>Feature Free Acts Afternoon and Evening</p>	<h2>WALTER SAVIDGE AMUSEMENT CO.</h2> <p>INCLUDING THE SAVIDGE DRAMATIC PLAYERS</p> <p>A FEW OF OUR PLAYS</p> <table> <tr> <td> GRAUSTARK <small>From the Novel by George Barr McCutcheon. Dramatized by Grace Hayward.</small> </td> <td> Call of the Cumberlands <small>From the Novel by Charles Neville Buck. Stage Version by Hugo Kirch.</small> </td> <td> That Printer of Udell's <small>From Novel by H. Bell Wright. Dramatized by W. Wright and Elbury W. Reynolds.</small> </td> </tr> </table> <p>Vaudeville of the Better Class Between the Acts</p>	GRAUSTARK <small>From the Novel by George Barr McCutcheon. Dramatized by Grace Hayward.</small>	Call of the Cumberlands <small>From the Novel by Charles Neville Buck. Stage Version by Hugo Kirch.</small>	That Printer of Udell's <small>From Novel by H. Bell Wright. Dramatized by W. Wright and Elbury W. Reynolds.</small>	<p>See the Oriental Reptile Museum</p> <hr/> <p>Visit the Clouds on the Ferris Wheel</p> <hr/> <p>Free Band Concerts Morning, Noon and Night</p>
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Long Pine Journal, June 2, 1916.



Some forms of old-time entertainment have not aged well. Like many traveling carnivals of the day, Savidge included “freak shows” featuring people with physical abnormalities. Performer George Thompson is shown here with his son. History Nebraska RG1667-6-1

Adapted from Rebecca A. Buller, “The Walter Savidge Amusement Company,” Nebraska History (Summer 2017). Last updated 6/29/20.

Swing Landscape

A piece recently treated at the Ford Center is this study for a mural entitled *Swing Landscape* by artist Stuart Davis. Davis was a New York artist who studied under Nebraska-raised artist Robert Henri. The mural was commissioned by the Works Progress Administration for a housing project in Brooklyn, New York and depicts the Gloucester, Massachusetts, waterfront. Influenced by jazz, radio, film and consumer products in America, Stuart's work makes use of vibrant colors, rhythm and abstract shapes. The mural is an oil on canvas that measures approximately three feet by 14 feet, and now resides at the Eskenazi Museum of Art at Indiana University, Bloomington. The study treated at the Ford Center belongs to the Sheldon Museum of Art and is only about 21 7/8" x 19 3/8". The study is graphite, and gouache, an opaque watercolor medium, on paper. It is signed, "STUART DAVIS 1936", in black ink at the bottom right edge of the image. Also written in graphite at the bottom right corner of the paper is a scale given for the image, along with the paper's height measurement.



"Swing Landscape" study before treatment.

The object was in fair condition. There were numerous areas of skinning or loss to the top layers of paper caused by removal of an adhesive placed on the back of a previous over mat. There were many small spots of shiny, yellowed adhesive remnants present on the sketch in the same locations as the skinning. The drawing had numerous scratches, scrapes, smudges and scuff marks overall, although they were in higher concentration at the upper and lower margins of the paper.



Mural study, during treatment. To the right of the red mark, the margin of the study has not been cleaned. To the left, the margin has been cleaned.

The sketch was removed from the backing board. Due to previous damage from hinges along the top edge, it was not possible to fully reduce the adhesive residues there. Surface cleaning was done to the sketch to reduce soiling on the recto and verso. However, the many scuffs and errant media marks, possibly from the artist were left alone and the margins were only cleaned to the point that the marks did not distract from the image. None of the marks were fully reduced so as not to reduce the historic value of the piece. Next, the adhesive residues in the image and around the margins were mechanically reduced to improve the overall appearance and prevent uneven discoloration from occurring in the future. Skinning damage within the image was lightly toned to reintegrate the design. The gray bands above and below the sketch had a fair amount of media loss from previous skinning damage. It was decided not to tone these areas as the damages show the function and history of the piece. Although treatment was minimal, the sketch is in better condition after being carefully cleaned and having the adhesive residues reduced.



Mural study, after treatment. Not the margins are cleaner and the media loss in the window area on the right has been toned.